

Protective Services Industry Review and Assessment of Strategies to Increase Workforce Diversity

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Period of Performance: July 2015 – January 2017

For the U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office, Coffey and its partner, the American Institutes for Research, undertook an exploratory study to identify promising practices for increasing diversity of first responders through a comprehensive literature review, visits to promising sites, and analyses of quantitative and qualitative data. Work is continuing on the final report and accompanying briefs and presentations.

Although the initial research on first responder diversity was relatively sparse and documentation of practices was in its infancy—that is, without demonstrated results—we identified sites across the nation that appeared to have promising practices and that reflected the local population’s demographics. The identification was accomplished by expanded online policy scan/internet search and the use of snowball sampling methodology through interviews with experts and association representatives in the field. We anticipate the study findings will make a significant contribution to a small but growing body of research that has the potential to impact not only first responders, but also the safety and well-being of the communities they represent, and the job prospects of historically underrepresented populations.

In preparation for the data collection and analysis, Coffey built a network of first responder experts and thought leaders through the Technical Work Group, site visits, and interviews who are available to assist with report briefings and other events associated with the study, as needed. Study teams met with and interviewed a range of critical staff at each site, from officers to chiefs, representing a variety of units from recruiting to training and community affairs. Additionally, they conducted in-depth interviews with individuals to learn not only about promising practices, but also personal stories and backgrounds that further enhanced the study findings. Deliverables will be completed and submitted on time and within budget.

The final report provides recommendations for further research and replication of practices on a larger scale. In addition to the report, Coffey prepared a practice brief, policy brief, and will present report findings at a presentation for both practitioners and policymakers.

This research expands on Coffey’s knowledge base and network by applying its experience in workforce and human resources to the first responder field specifically. Combined with its research and evaluation capabilities, Coffey has the capacity to expand on this exploratory study through more in-depth surveys or impact evaluations pertaining to diversity practices in general and specifically as applied to first responders.